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Charity Registration Number: 208223

Transcript Q&A

The Role of Traditional Values in Europe's Future

Viktor Orbán

Prime Minister of Hungary

Chair: Professor Lord Alton of Liverpool

9 October 2013

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Question 1:

There are some parities between you and the Japanese prime minister, Shinzō Abe, so to put importance on traditional values and decrease the independence of national or central bank, and strongly want your economy ... but at the same time there are a lot of criticisms from the Western countries. So, in Japan, some Western journalists criticize – Japan is coming back to militarism, but I can't see any mysteries because defence expenditure of GDP is still below one per cent, and how do you think both of you should deal with such kind of criticism from the Western countries? And also I am very afraid the national sentiment in your country – and how do you deal with Jobbik and such kind of wrong nationalist movement?

Viktor Orbán:

So, as just you have mentioned we have quite a high number of similarities between the way of thinking of the Japanese political leadership and the Hungarian one, but we shouldn't neglect the differences, which basically came from the different situation of the two nations. We don't have sea. That was not always the case, but now we don't have sea. That's first, so we are a landlocked country. Second, as a result of the First World War, we lost all the territories which belonged previously to Hungary which produced for our nation the energy and all the raw materials. So, Hungary is a country which is landlocked, no raw materials and no natural energy sources, which means that the only way to survive, to maintain ourselves and improve our quality of life, could be the outcome of what we are able to produce by our hands and by our brains, so that's the reason why the situation is quite unique. It's very difficult to find any similar situated country in that sense, even in the European Union.

On military expenditures, it's a long debate as you know here. The Europeans has a double feeling; they would not like to be served by the Americans in terms of military security but at the same time they would not like to spend for that, it's impossible. So sooner or later the Europeans should make a decision whether they would like to get a higher level of independence in that term or to pay for more security. So you cannot be independent from the expenditures of the other nation, that's so simple. So, that's the discussion which is going on and there is no unified or agreed point on that.

National sentiment; I think national sentiment is a good thing. I don't know philosophically where you are stand for, but I think everything is good when a

human being is ready to approve that there is something more important and bigger than is personal to himself, a nation, that kind of thing. To serve the nation, to like your nation, is a good thing because it means that you are able to overlook your personal interest and you are ready to do something to sacrifice, even for something which you consider bigger than just your personal interest. I think it's good, so national sentiment is not a danger, it's a positive energy which can help us to mobilize all of our capacities.

Jobbik is an important point. Nobody knows here, or not everybody knows here, what is Jobbik. Jobbik is a radical, we could say radical nationalist party in Hungary which is generally considered as an evidence that in Hungary there's a constant danger of nationalism, anti-Semitism, xenophobia, whatever – so this party testifies, in the minds of many of west European observers, that danger. But historically you should know that this party got 16 or 17 per cent at the last election and if you look back to the history of Hungary we can say that in any election, generally speaking, the radical forces always got like that, sometimes the communists, sometimes the radical right. So 16, 17 per cent in the Hungarian political culture always goes to that kind of radical parties. So therefore the question is not what is about this 16 per cent, the question is what we have with the other 84 that stabilize the country, so that's the reason why we feel not to be bothered at all by that kind of development. It would be better to see zero or something like that, but it's democracy, it's impossible, so therefore we have to live with that and we have to have an experience how to treat it, how to handle it and how to manage a democratic policy with that background.

Question 2:

Hungary's not the only country in Europe which has an active far right party which is sometimes inciting violence. We've seen this also in Greece recently where Golden Dawn has been banned. We also see far right movements in a number of countries which are pushing mainstream right parties further to the right, particularly on issues like migration, also xenophobia. What's your view on how across Europe these parties should be treated? Is it right to ban them, for example, in circumstances where there's incitement to violence or where indeed members of the party have themselves committed violent acts? Should there be EU-level involvement in this and should centre-right parties – do you see a real threat to centre-right parties that they'll be driven away from traditional values by these parties and actually they'll try to outflank them; is that, do you think, a big risk for traditional values in Europe?

Viktor Orbán:

First of all, the centre-right parties should not be terrified at all because, as you have just said, of threatening the traditional values because this party does not represent traditional values. They speak about traditional values but they don't do that. They are radicals. Radicalism is something different, so patriotism will be never supported by them. They support nationalism and xenophobia, which is different. It's not a traditional value anyway. Traditional values is to be patriotic, or to be Christian is a traditional value, but to be extreme whatever – political or supporter of a political ideology based on not the Imago Dei as just I tried to explain, that's not traditional value. Traditional value is Soli Deo Gloria, not the hubris, but centre-right parties always are motivated by hubris, I'm sorry, the extreme right parties are motivated by hubris and not by Soli Deo Gloria, that's different. So, I think the centre-right are strong enough to keep traditional values in its original form as it is.

The second point is how to treat them nationally. So each nation has its own constitution which makes clear where is the border of freedom of speech, freedom of establishing organizations and so on, so it should be not internationalized, that's the job of the national political leadership. And the third point you have made is about the reason. The reason is not the crisis; the reason is the lack of leadership of the centre-right or centre-left political elite or political parties. Now, when we are living in a crisis the instinct of the people looking for real leadership is stronger than in the time when everything is in a prosperous situation. The problem of the European Union is that there is a misunderstanding of political leadership and that kind of concept of leadership, which anyway could work under a good situation or well managed situation, is not the proper one concept of leadership for Kazakhstan. So the concept of European Union and we could say broadly in the European culture is that leadership is institutional.

Just listen to the European leaders, when we touched upon that issue, leadership, they are always next sentence speaking about institutions and processes and when we are living in a crisis it's not enough. We need persons, personal leadership, so we need a good balance between institutional leadership, personal leadership, processes and individual decisions, so if you don't have that balance the feeling of the people is that there is no leadership. So that's the reason why it sounds very empty, this is the reason why we find very empty the statements of the European Union leaders speaking on institutions and processes and so on. So, I think if you would like to fight against the radicals, we should have moderate, strong leaders; that's the best way to isolate them.

Question 3:

I was very struck by your remark about traditional values and economic modernization, because going back the last 20, 30 years it's always been the idea that traditional values are the enemies of economic progress, that actually what we must do, destroy the family, small businesses, become hypermodern. Are we now in a situation where centre-right parties can actually make an argument that economic modernization requires traditional values? For instance, the debate about welfare, it's never in the whole of human history have we ever had the idea that people could get something for nothing, and the idea that we need to have a world in which people get something for something is popular in this country and I think is increasingly popular in Europe.

Also the return of small businesses, it's now acknowledged that small businesses are more innovative than big businesses, they're the ones that put on jobs, yet we followed an economic model that effectively penalizes and dispossesses them. So if you look at anything from the Mittelstand in Germany, to Lombardy in northern Italy, to Catalonia in Spain, the economic renaissance of those areas is based on traditional values. So, two questions; do you see a future for the European centre-right in allying economic modernization with traditional values, and in what ways would you push it further, what other traditional values are required? In the City of London we have millions of businessmen looking for ethics but can't find any. What is your view for the future of traditional values and economic modernization, and what is Hungary specifically going to offer in that regard, both for itself and for the centre-right?

Viktor Orbán:

So, traditional values and economic modernization. If you have a deeper look on what we call the crisis, we can realize that the lack of traditional values was the main reason how the modern financial system almost collapsed, so probably that's an argument in favour of the traditional values and the role they can play in economic modernization. I am not speaking about the bankers, which is a very popular item anyway, so the problem of lacking traditional values is just not an exclusive territory for the bankers. If you look at the American story, how the whole financial crisis started with the mortgages, I read in a study saying that 70 per cent of the American people, homeowners, falsify the information about the real value of his home, so the lack of traditional values not just on the big-headed businessmen but even

among ourselves is a problem for the future. So we can't maintain the wellbeing and high level of living standards without respecting certain values, and these values are human values, which means traditional values. You can't falsify the information about the value of your own property, even if there is a good partner by the bankers, so it's not the reason to do so. So that kind of thing I think is part of the argument why we should calmly argue in favour of to coincide the traditional values at all level of human being and economic modernization.

EPP, the European People's Party – so we have some difficulties. The basic difficulty is that people like to win elections. It's not unnatural when we speak about political parties, but the perception of the EPP or – EPP is made of the member parties – so the perception of the member parties is, I can't say everywhere but in the overwhelming majority of the European Union countries, that if they would like to win election they can't pronounce honestly the values which are the basis for the political programme, because their perception is that somehow the European society has moved away from the traditional values, and therefore if they would like to collect more voters or more votes, they should probably lie, but at least neglect to confess about the real values they stand for.

So therefore the EPP and some other international organizations, which originally were a Christian-initiated or inspired or traditional value-based organization, moving slowly but surely to the direction of the left, and instead of accepting the challenge of the discussion and the values, we just adjust ourselves to that so-called European mainstream, and the European mainstream is dictated not by the traditional value representative persons at this moment, neither in political life, neither in public life, neither in the media, so, I don't know what is the way out of this, but I feel strongly how we suffer, so we should find a way out of that. What I try to do, to find a way at the national framework out of this trap and it's easy by a two-thirds majority. The others are in a far more difficult situation, but we try to provide an example, probably, not just to run the country quite acceptable way, based on two-thirds majority, is possible on traditional values, but next election probably we can deliver an evidence that even you can win an election on that basis; who knows.

Question 4:

You spoke of winning a two-thirds majority. I think it would probably enlighten a lot of people in the audience if they understood that if Hungary elected

people to parliament by the same first-past-the-post system that Britain does, your party would have won every single seat.

Viktor Orbán:

Except two.

Question 4:

Except two in the Hungarian parliament.

Viktor Orbán:

Unfortunately!

Question 4:

I mention this because my last invitation to Chatham House was for a talk entitled, 'Understanding and Dealing with Populist Extremism in Europe'. The reason why I mention this is that it comes from a conceptual space where western European nations – a lot of people think that the idea of the nation state as understood by the Treaty of the Westphalia model is coming to an end, at the same time when countries in eastern Europe and central and eastern Europe are grasping this idea like never before. So, given that the Lisbon Treaty imputes the European Union with the competence of civil rights, what do you think are the civil rights consequences and the civil rights challenges faced by the European Union in the next generation?

Viktor Orbán:

It's a difficult question. So, to speak about the Hungarian election, it's an easier issue for me, I feel more security on that issue. Yes, we got two-thirds majority in terms of the seats of the parliament, but first-past-the-post system we would have got more than 98 per cent. We have a complicated system, but we have single constituencies – 176 and we got 174. It's not a bad result anyway. This was not the reason why we changed the system, because we created a new system. We were the party who were absolutely dissatisfied with the previous one, with understandable reasons, so now we created a

new system and we're cutting to half the number of the seats in the house. So we reduced by 50 per cent of the seats in the house and we reduced by 50 per cent of the seats in the country councils also, so we should say we cut into half the political elite in Hungary. We don't know how that change will impact on us at the next election, but it will be more difficult to get the same result as we have had previously.

If you are looking for the secret of that success, unfortunately I have to confess that it plays a big role – the weakness of our opponents, and this is my answer to your question because democracy based on strong rivalling parties, and if one is missing it's not good for democracy. In the long term if you would like to maintain discourse, discussions and arguments and so on, you need partners, and in Hungary for several reasons – I think it's not appropriate to explain the history of the communism and post-communism in Hungary, but as the outcome of this whole process of the last 20 years, with the history of the post-communist forces, they were not strong enough to survive the crisis and they collapsed, and when a political elite is collapsing the other political elite and political family has a far easier job. So it would be good to think that all the people voted for us because we are so good, but unfortunately I am not sure that this is the case. The lack of alternative played an important role. (I am not terrified by the fact they are still in the shape as they were anyway, just half a year before the election). But in longer term it's clear that we need real rivalling, well-shaped and well-positioned, well-programmed parties in order to maintain the real dispute, because dispute is the basis of modern democracies.

So, my argument against populism is discourse. Just, unlike – many people and political leaders in Europe think that discourse, discussions and arguments is good for populists and bad for those who are more seriously looking for a rational argument, but I don't think so. I think argument is good for us, so when a populist leader is coming up to the scene and we have a serious discussion it takes not more than several minutes that their arguments are empty, their promises are empty, so no problem. So, against populism just we should encourage the open and public discussion, as your name of the institution has just exemplified for us, so don't change the name of the institution, regardless what is going on in the future in the European Union.

Question 5:

Just two small questions, Mr Prime Minister. Do you think there is a need of a pan-European solution to resolve the plight of Romani gypsy, the Roma population throughout Europe and in Hungary in particular? And also prime minister, can your government give any assurance to ethnic minorities wanting to invest or live in Hungary, people of ethnic background who love, who enjoy living in Hungary, what are the assurances you can give them to avoid any fear? Thank you very much.

Viktor Orbán:

So, I can't provide or I can't argue for more than traditional values in that respect as well. If it is true that traditional values and traditional value-based political parties follow the lesson of Imago Dei, it's good for the minorities, so who is black and who is white, it was not our decision, it was decision of the God and we have to respect it, and we all belong to the Imago Dei, so therefore I think the Christian policy is always a good policy for the minorities everywhere in Europe. That's my honest confession on that subject and that would be good for gypsies, and that's the reason why I'm very happy that among the gypsies in Hungary the traditional church is doing a great job to help them to integrate and to be part of the society. We should not neglect them that kind of social energy of the traditional churches in Hungary.

Whether we need a European solution for the Romas or not – definitely yes, because we do not have borders any more of the Schengen arrangement we have, they are moving or they could move, plus many of them are by definition moving people. The Hungarian gypsies are a little bit different because they are settled back to hundreds of years, but basically now they can move, even the settled Romas can move all around Europe, so if we find a solution for their situation to help them to be integrated into society in Hungary and they don't like it or they have another alternative in their minds they can move around, so it's better to have a European approach.

We provided that programme – when Hungary provided the leadership for the European Council we provided a programme of the European gypsies in a European framework. I think it's not bad, but I can't say it's done because it's a very, very long process. We are speaking about more than 10 million people all around in Europe which has a different approach, not just to the values, but they have a different approach to how they organize their life. So it's a very sophisticated job and challenge to convince them that it's better for

them to be integrated more than they are at this moment, but this is the responsibility of the majority, so we have to work on that.

Question 6:

Prime Minister, do you agree that the present rate of population growth is economically unsustainable in the long term?

Viktor Orbán:

Would you be so kind to repeat the first?

Lord Alton:

He was suggesting that population growth worldwide is unsustainable, which of course is the opposite of what you were arguing earlier about the European population.

Viktor Orbán:

So, to answer to that question we need a deeper knowledge than I do have, but I have a very amateur concept on that and I think that if I read correctly the figures, somehow in 2050 we will reach a level of population, after that there is a chance that it maybe not grow. I don't know whether it's true or not, but it's promising that somehow the globe has a self-regulation process in that sense, but I think the growing population of underdeveloped countries cannot be an argument not to help the demographic tendencies and turn the tide on that sense here in Europe. So, I think we can have a problem which is worldwide and we have a different kind of problem which is local, means European or even Hungarian, so I don't know whether you would like to relate the two points to each other, but I would like to argue against it.

Question 7:

The question I've got is this: it's around the title of your talk, 'The Role of Traditional Values'. For the poorest in Europe the answer to the question, the role of traditional values in Europe's future, they will say it is to entrench the privileged rich. So in Britain, the Tax Justice Network estimates that £13

trillion is buried away in tax havens overseas by the super-rich, the elite, and since 2008 in Britain we have seen the greatest transfer of wealth from the poor to the rich through the bank bailout, the greatest transfer of wealth since the medieval age. So, the question I've got is this, I don't think it helps to use this title 'traditional values', Christian values perhaps or even Christian democracy is perhaps closer to the answer to that question about what would be fair and just for the future of Europe. I just want to know what you, Viktor – what your ambition is within European Christian democracy, to return to some of those deeper more durable values that are perhaps closer to the answer to this question rather than tradition, which actually can work in entirely the opposite direction.

Viktor Orbán:

Thank you very much. To answer to the last question concerning my possible role in the international arena, I should be very careful because the question is not decided, it's unanswered, whether Hungary is a black sheep or a wise country. Therefore the leader of the country is a stupid man or a visionary leader, so it's not clarified at this moment, internationally at least. So, therefore without having a clear and positive answer to that question I am very cautious to take any kind of international position because I have to fight for Hungary and for the policy what we are doing, so that's more than 100 per cent engagement for myself.

Rich – again here a point which we understand and look at in a different way and different form. So the problem of Hungary, unlike the example you have quoted here, that we don't have rich enough number of persons, the problem is not the richness but the lack of the rich families, that's the problem, because we had a communist system in Hungary for 40 years. All family property was confiscated, major companies, smaller companies, middle-sized were confiscated and nationalized, so therefore we don't have an accumulation of the capital. So therefore in Hungary, it's one of the poorest countries in Europe anyway, but at the same time I have to argue in favour of how to provide chances for the poor to become part of the middle class but at the same time I have to run a policy which help the riches to accumulate more capital and to provide a stable background and backbone for the Hungarian economy.

So therefore that's the reason why the heritage taxation in Hungary is zero, so we would like to convince the families that it has sense to accumulate generation by generation because they have experienced just the opposite,

so that's the reason why our understanding of richness and social structure is different than your challenges here in Britain, obviously because of the history. So, therefore what I am doing in Hungary is basically arguing in favour of the middle class. You should know that in Hungary the average income monthly, on a net basis, is a little bit more than €500 per month and the average pension in Hungary monthly, on net basis, €320. Can you imagine that? So, that's the reason why when I'm accused by being populist, can you imagine how difficult to argue in favour of the flat tax in a country which has that kind of social background, so it's a complicated job, more complicated than it seems to be probably.

So anyway, my point is that in Europe – now leaving Hungary behind us – in Europe it's very positive that we have a new holy father whose approach to this whole social question, wealth and so on, is different. I would not like to say that it would be nice to create new regulation based on that teaching or his teaching, I would not like to say that, but it's very important that now we have a voice outside the party politician landscape, saying that, oh look guys, wait a sec, stop and think. I think it's important, because something should be done with that kind of distortion of the natural way of life as just you have described here.

Question 8:

Prime Minister, you talked a bit about the importance of emphasizing the diversity of countries inside the EU, meanwhile many countries are pushing for more political and economic integration. By doing the opposite of that, do you fear that you risk isolating Hungary inside the bloc and what could be the consequences of that?

Viktor Orbán:

Political isolation in the modern world is strongly related to success. If Hungary will be a successful country it will be not isolated. If we fail we will.

Question 9:

I must apologize if my question is a little bit off the topic. You may or may not be aware that former prosecutor-general and the justice minister of Georgia, who fled his country the next day after the parliamentary election, and who is now charged with four articles of Georgia's criminal code including mass ill

treatment of prisoners and the abuse of power, is said to be in Hungary, successfully claimed asylum and effectively avoiding justice. It is worth noting that Mr [Zurab] Adeishvili – he is one of the odious figures in Georgian politics. For example after he fled the country, in the next few weeks Georgian Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights identified 200 political prisoners in the country, and I have a printed copy of the report by the commissioner of Human Rights for the Council of Europe that cites the interesting statistics. And when this person was a justice minister and effectively the general prosecutor, in 2010 in all criminal cases in Georgia the acquittal rate was only 0.2 per cent, effectively meaning that for every 1,000 persons this person brought charges against, only two persons were acquitted in the courts.

David Alton:

Could you bring it to a question?

Question 9:

There are also some allegations in Georgian media as to why Mr Adeishvili chose Hungary, and not other Western countries with more established democracies, and they alleged that because of his close links of the high-ranking Hungarian officials – so I wouldn't ask you to comment on some speculations, but I really do hope that you will have some time in the nearest future to close into this case, to see this case closed.

Viktor Orbán:

I am not here to look for squabbles with any person who is nice enough to pose any question, but please would you be so kind to rethink your expression on a more established democracy, because we think Hungary is a well-established democracy so there is no reason to say that we are a less established democracy than others and that could be a reason for anything. Sorry for that. Politics is sometimes defined as art, as a kind of art, and just on that background you have described here, may I just say that we have the best ever bilateral relationship with the present Georgian government.

Question 10:

Prime Minister, I have to say you make talking about the Christian basis of traditional values look very easy. We live in a country where consensus is best achieved, it is thought, by not mentioning religion. I'm reminded of a Turkish taxi driver who told me that he was going back to Istanbul because he no longer knew the code here; there were so many people with different backgrounds. What advice would you have for our politicians in terms of reasserting something that we can actually get a grip on, get a hold of, in terms of values?

Viktor Orbán:

I am not paid for giving any advice to the British government, so I would like to be as cautious as possible, because it's a very complicated life here, and not to live here it's very risky to say any otherwise on that. Hungary is a different country in that sense. So, there are two schools at this moment how to organize the civilized way of living together. One is saying you should neglect your cultural background, don't speak about it, it's easier to live together. The second say just courageously confess what you think about the basic attributes or basic things of the world. I belong to the second school, so it's not my job to advise anybody, but I think to neglect and not to speak about the real important thing in our life, it cannot be the way to live peacefully together with others who has different kind of concepts. So therefore to confess your values, to represent it and to argue in favour of living together with those who has different kind of concepts, that could be the way.

It's very traditional, may I say, a little bit arch-conservative, but I don't have any better answer to your question. In Hungary it's a little bit easier because ethnically and from the point of view of religious life we are less complicated than you are, and the immigration question therefore it's very important, so it's very risky to have to say anything about it. All my advisers would advise just the opposite. But anyway, I think if you have a chance and in Hungary we do have, to maintain the majority of your culture and your ethnic composition and the majority of the Hungarians, please do it – that's my advice to the Hungarians, to accept those who would like to come to live together with them, but the majority is a different issue. If the majority is not on your side, in that kind of sense, your country totally changed, spiritually as well, so, I try to be as rational as possible.

Question 11:

My question is, is the British Conservative Party's influence and credibility as a leading centre-right party in the European Parliament at all undermined by its lack of membership of the EPP, and as this government is about to embark on a major renegotiation process, would its prospects be aided if the major coalition party re-joined the EPP?

Viktor Orbán:

Limited. There is a joke among the politicians in the EPP that the British are always different and it does not help a lot to put together an international party platform. The party life at European level is very difficult for the Conservatives – I mean EPP and the British Conservatives also. It's easy for the leftists, the leftists just say internationalism, more distribution of the wealth and some other international priority background slogans, and they know each other and they can work together. So the ability of the left to cooperate and to accept the diversity inside the political platform, it's far more developed than the right, because, I would not like to insult the left, but on the right they take seriously what we are speaking about.

So, if we realize that on basic things we have differences, it's very difficult for us to cooperate, and Conservatives always speak about the real important things, so therefore to create a common platform for the right it's very difficult in Europe. Can you imagine to have the same platform for the Portuguese conservative party, which is called Social Democratic Party anyway which says something about the situation over there, and the British Conservative? So therefore I admire Wilfried Martens very much, who is the president of the European People's Party, who was able up to now to keep together that colourful group of parties. And we fought for years for the British anyway to keep them somehow in, inside the European People's Party, but we have realized that it's impossible.

So, it does not mean that the British Conservatives has no important role in the European Parliament. I am not a parliamentarian in the European Parliament, but I have some experiences. I am sometimes, may I say, invited to be accused. And so I have some personal experiences, and my personal experience is that the British has a voice, an important voice. Probably when they count the votes it's not a big one, but when the argument is going on, the traditional approach of the British Conservative, the way the argument, the way – how they try to be as crystal clear in their argument, that has an

important impact on the European Parliament. So, being outside the European People's Party does not mean that it has no sense to be part of the European Parliament on a British basis.

Lord Alton:

Viktor, would you like to sit down for a moment and I would just like to thank you properly. Thank you.

Viktor Orbán:

Thank you, David.

Lord Alton:

Well, Prime Minister, your reception here today I think perhaps rather different from your experiences in the European Parliament and I just want to thank you. For 45 minutes you've taken questions, you've taken whatever people want to ask, a whole diverse range of issues have been brought up here today and you've answered with candour, with frankness and with intelligence. I think for those of us who were born in the 1950s and who have recollections of the Hungarian Uprising, and then lived through the 1960s and 1970s and saw the dead hand of communism in Eastern European countries and the former Soviet Union, and then the game of Grandmother's Footsteps played out across Europe in 1989 and the collapse of the Berlin Wall, and the thought in those days that we would have a democratically elected prime minister of Hungary here at Chatham House willing to answer in the way that you have this array of questions, I don't think many of us would have believed that some of these things would have been possible. I think that you know that in the United Kingdom, that your country, that Hungary has great respect, affection, and love as well, and you will always, I know, be a very welcome visitor to the United Kingdom. Thank you very much for being here at Chatham House today and I'd ask the audience as well to just join with me once more.